

# Chapter 8

## The Use of Grounded Theory in Researching Information Centres

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter challenges information management researchers to employ the grounded theory research approach as it is detailed, rigorous, systematic, and flexible. The approach also permits researchers to go beyond the conventional thinking by allowing the emergence of new conceptual models, theories, and framework(s) on the subject under investigation. The chapter provides a discourse on the key features of grounded theory and the two fundamental schools of grounded theory. The overall aim of the chapter is to explain the applicability and rationale of grounded theory in researching information centres. As such, the chapter discusses the perceived challenges of using grounded theory, debates the place of literature in a grounded theory study, and explores the issues of research population, sampling, and sample size in a grounded theory research. Other essential aspects discussed in the chapter are the concepts of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The chapter also demonstrates how data in a grounded theory study should be analysed and processed.*

### **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

Grounded theory (GT) is used when a research seeks to develop a model or theory on an investigated matter using the empirical field evidence and not to verify an existing theory. Researchers using the GT approach should conduct the research with disciplinary interests, background assumptions and an acquaintance with the literature and existing theories in the discipline but should not use the collected data to either approve or disprove the existing theories. Instead, a theory is developed through an analysis of the data collected from the research. Researchers studying on information centres (thus, repositories of public knowledge such as, museums, libraries and art galleries) are encouraged to employ the GT research approach as it is detailed, rigorous, systematic, and flexible. It permits the researcher to go

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beyond the conventional thinking by allowing the emergence of new conceptual models, theories and framework(s) on the subject that is under investigation (Jones & Alony, 2011). There are two fundamental schools of GT, namely the Glaserian school and the Straussian school. These two schools have different views towards the use of GT in scientific studies. Their major distinction is seen in that the Straussian school allows researchers to have a general idea of where to begin, whereas the Glaserian school requires researchers to approach the field with a general wonderment where the mind would be blank (Onions, 2006). Ralph, Birks, and Chapman (2015) indicated that GT is dynamic because of its differences in philosophical standpoints within its monolith. In this dynamic state, GT responds to social pressures, changes over time, and adapts to the moment in which it is used.

The key features of GT are its iterative study design, theoretical sampling and system of analysis (Lingard, Albert & Levinson, 2008). These features require researchers to conduct a series of concurrent data collection and analysis. This implies that data analysis should always inform the next cycle of data collection until a saturation point is reached. It also means that the sample of a study must not be set at the beginning of the research but should be purposefully selected as the analysis of the data progresses. The informants of the research must be chosen for their capability to supply the required data.

The objective of this chapter is to argue for the need by social science researchers, particularly scholars researching information centres to adopt the GT research approach in their studies. Based on the author's experiences on previous studies in information science, it seems as if the GT research approach is not popular with information scientists' as the bulk of research on information centres have been done following the conventional research approaches that mostly seek to test existing theories. The goals of this chapter are therefore to:

- Explicate the applicability and rationale of GT in researching information centres
- Discuss the perceived challenges of using GT
- Debate the place of literature in a GT study
- Explore the issues of research population, sampling and sample size in a GT research
- Unpack the concepts of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability
- Demonstrate how to analyse and process data from a GT study

## **RATIONALE FOR GROUNDED THEORY IN INVESTIGATING INFORMATION CENTRES**

Unlike a plethora of social science studies that have been done with the intention of testing and verifying existing theories, it is crucial for researchers investigating information centres to engage in studies that seek to generate a theory, framework or model. The reader is referred to Chapter Two that further discusses the concept of theorizing. The importance of taking this approach is that a theory generated out of empirical evidence is much closer to the truth and reality than trying to suit research findings to a particular theory (Bryant & Charmaz, 2011). Moreover, a study that develops a theory presents the much needed bridge between practice and research (Southern & Devlin, 2010). GT emerges as an essential research approach that presents possibilities for the development of theoretical frameworks from the data gathered and analysed (Payne, 2016). It gives a researcher the tools to answer why questions from an interpretive paradigmatic stance (Charmaz, 2012). GT research approach allows researchers to discern what is happening in their data that is different from what has already been said (Locke, 2015) and to

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